

King County Parks funding timeline 2002 to present

2002 – County Budget Crunch:

- February 2002 - Non-mandatory services, including parks and human services, told they would see major funding reductions in 2003 in order to balance the King County budget. The Parks Division was directed in February to expect budget cuts in 2003 of up to 85 percent.
- March 2002 – A preliminary Parks Business Plan was drafted to identify all potential short-term revenue sources or spending cuts.
- April 2002 – The Metropolitan Parks Task Force (MPTF) Advisory Group was formed to address the funding crisis. The task force recommended that Parks should:
 - Engage in broad array of new entrepreneurial strategies.
 - Transfer or close in-city local parks.
 - Reallocate other county revenues temporarily to support the division.

Parks Division Implements MPTF Recommendations:

The Parks Division implemented the recommendations of the MPTF:

- 26 in-city parks and pools were transferred by early 2003.
- The existing user fee structure was overhauled to raise additional revenues.
- Entrepreneurial staff were hired to focus on securing partnerships, grants, sponsorships to enhance services.
- The 2003 budget was approved with one-time support from other county programs, including road levy money for trails, and surface water management money for resource and ecological land support.
- One-third of Parks Division staff positions were cut.
- The Parks Division's budget was reduced from \$25.5 million in 2002 to \$16.4 million in 2003.

2003 – A short-term funding solution is found:

The MPTF understood that those changes would not be enough to save King County's parks system. They further recommended an additional source of funding:

"...The park system cannot remain open without an ongoing base of tax support....To avoid significant park mothballing in 2004, we are recommending that a property tax

ballot measure be placed before the voters of King County in 2003.” - MPTF Phase II Report, February, 2003.

February 2003 - The Metropolitan Task Force recommended King County place a measure on a countywide ballot for a six-year, 5.5-cent levy to fund the operation and maintenance of regional and rural local county parks. Executive Sims recommended a six-year, five cent levy. The County Council eventually approved a four-year, 4.9 cent levy, which was submitted to the voters in May.

May 2003 - 57 percent of voters approved the levy. The levy provides 57 percent of the Parks Division's maintenance and operation funding. The levy, which was put into place in 2004 and expires at the end of 2007, staved off wholesale layoffs and park closures, but was not enough to achieve pre-crisis maintenance levels

2007 – Renewing, restoring and protecting parks, open space

Parks maintenance funding remains below the 2002 budget crisis level.

- The current levy keeps parks open, which allows the Parks Division to generate revenue at those parks. This leveraged contribution equals more than 75 percent of the total operating budget.
- Business and entrepreneurial revenues are growing at an anticipated rate of 5 percent per year, and today comprise about 21 percent of the Parks Division's total operating budget.
- Each year, there have been limited additions of passive open space acreage added to system through Conservation Futures Tax proceeds.
- King County's trail system added or developed about five miles of trails each year.
- Transfers of remaining urban parks will continue as annexations or incorporations occur.

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